

riparian rights

{ruh-pair'-ee-uhn}

Riparian rights are those privileges enjoyed by a person who owns land on a river or other body of water concerning use of the water and the bed under the water. The water in a river is not the person's property, but the person does own the bank and generally half the riverbed. Under common law, the owner can use unlimited amounts of water for domestic needs (household, animals, garden) but is usually limited to a so-called reasonable share for artificial needs, such as irrigation. The question of what is reasonable use in relation to the needs of other riparian landowners is one of fact and must be decided by a court. In the case of navigable streams, the riparian rights are considerably reduced.